

Frequently Asked Questions on Deer Management

Why has there been no population survey (count) of deer in the Village since 2005?

The most accurate method of conducting a population census is a photo survey of deer at feeding sites using cameras triggered by the deer, which is how the 2005 census was conducted. This method requires a core population of tagged deer. To tag deer, the deer must be captured, which requires a permit from the DEC.

The plan under consideration by the Village includes a population survey. In the first phase, deer would be captured, surgically sterilized and tagged. Once we have a sufficient tagged population, the Village will conduct a population census through a camera survey, a counting method with higher accuracy than aerial photo surveying.

Why not trap and relocate the deer?

This option is not legal in New York State. A primary reason for this prohibition is to prevent the transmission and spread of disease. Another reason is the high mortality rate among relocated deer.

For a more complete discussion, please refer to the following NYS DEC article that can be found on the Village's website:
http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife_pdf/ctguide07.pdf The discussion of capture and relocation is found on pp. 7-8.

Why not "let nature take its course" and self correct?

Harsh winters, such as our current winter, do help to "correct" deer overpopulation through starvation. The Board does not consider this to be a desirable control method.

Why not address the deer population through fencing alone?

Fencing is already allowed in the Village. The current Village Zoning Ordinance allows for fences over 4 feet with a 25 foot setback in the front yard and a 15 foot setback in the side and rear yards. At those distances or more, a property owner can construct a fence without limitations on height or material.

The Board does not consider fencing alone an alternative to deer population reduction, as fencing simply relocates and concentrates deer onto unfenced areas. However, some Board members feel that residents should be given enhanced options for symptomatic relief through a modification of the fence ordinance.

The Board will hold a Public Hearing on Proposed Local Law A "Fences and Walls" at our 3/14/2011 meeting at 7 pm. This proposed local law (available on the Village website) would allow the same options for fences as are allowed under the current Ordinance,

and would also allow for 8 foot fencing at the property line in the rear and side yards, with some restrictions. Additionally, this proposed local law would allow enclosure fencing within the 25 foot front yard setback area, with stated conditions.

Why not address management of the deer population through sterilization or contraception alone?

For sterilization to be effective, 90 to 95 % of does need to be sterilized. Given the estimate of approximately 200 deer in the Village, this would be an extremely large undertaking and considerable time would be needed to bring the population down.

Many advocate the use of immuno-contraception in place of surgical sterilization. This option is not currently viable for a variety of reasons. There is currently no immuno-contraceptive on the market in the US for use in wild deer. Further, of those in development, there is no single dose application available. All require a booster in approx 2 years. Further, the deer need to be tagged (for monitoring purposes), which means the deer must be captured regardless of whether surgically sterilizing or administering a contraceptive dose. Though, in theory, a dart gun can be used to administer subsequent contraceptive boosters, abiding by the 500 foot weapon discharge law for dart guns makes this highly impractical. It is also difficult if not impossible to recapture the does for retreatment/boosting. Therefore it is more efficient to simply surgically sterilize them when they are initially captured initially for tagging.

Why has the Village Board not surveyed Village residents regarding deer management?

NYS law does not provide legal authority for a municipality to conduct a survey of its residents or hold a referendum. It would not be lawful for the Village to do so, regardless of the source of funding for the survey. If a private person or entity wished to conduct a survey of Village residents, the Village would consider the methodology and results to the extent relevant to any pending decisions.

It should be noted that the Village elections conducted over the past several election cycles served as a de facto survey of Village residents, as the primary issue dividing the candidates for Board positions was their support of, or opposition to, a deer management plan that involved culling of the herd. In the case of each such election of a Board member, the candidate who supported such action by the Village was elected. It should also be noted that at both of the public hearings conducted in the course of completing the Village's SEQR review, a significant majority of the Village residents who spoke or submitted comments were in favor of such a management plan.

Why not hold a referendum on a deer management plan?

Like conducting a survey, NYS law does not authorize a municipality to conduct a referendum on a question such as this. The Village elections each March give residents the opportunity to voice their approval or disapproval of current Board policies by choosing new members of the Board of Trustees.

Can acting “alone” be effective? Won’t deer simply migrate in from surrounding communities?

While Cayuga Heights obviously has porous borders, we would not be acting alone as many of our neighbors are already working to control the deer numbers. Cornell University has implemented a highly effective deer management program, combining surgical sterilization and managed hunting. The Village of Lansing uses a program of controlled bow hunting. Hunting is legal in many portions of the Town of Ithaca, and in surrounding more rural communities.

Why is the Board moving so slowly? When will a decision be made?

Given the controversy surrounding deer population control, the Board has deliberately undertaken a thorough assessment of all options.

The lengthiest part of the review process, the State Environmental Quality Review, is nearing completion. The following excerpt from the Timeline of Deer Management outlines the SEQR process to date.

Once the Board votes to accept the Final Environmental Impact Statement and SEQR Findings, the Board can vote on the implementation of a deer management plan. We expect the FEIS to be accepted at our 3/14/11 meeting. With Village Elections on 3/15/11, the incoming Board will be in place to vote on implementation.